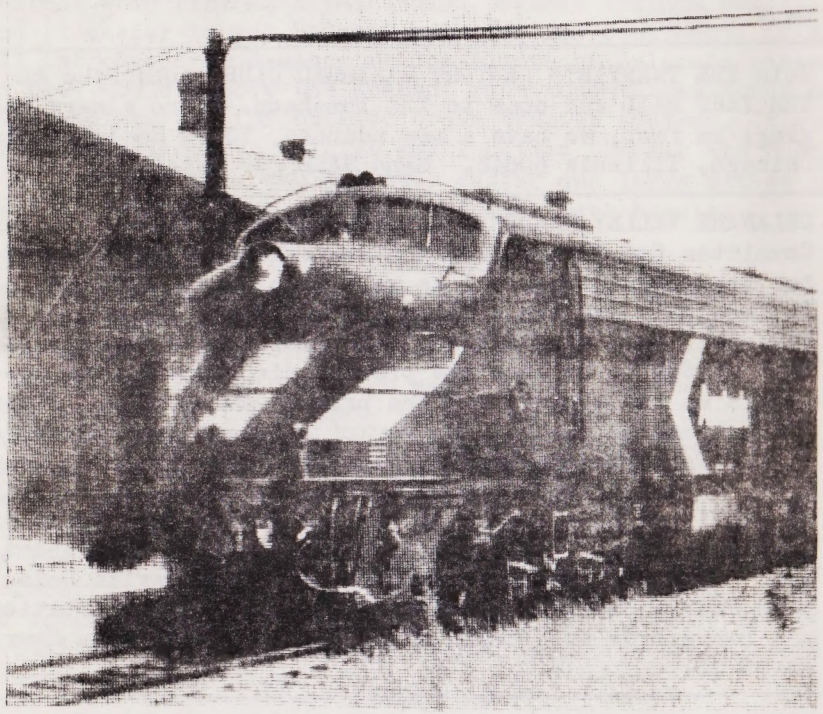
FROM: Message Media
P.O. Box 9007
Berkeley CA 94709 USA

BERKELEY CALIF. AUG 29 AM

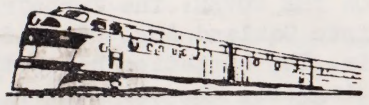
First Class

To:



First locomotive to receive Amtrak paint was Penn Central no. 4316, an E8 unit decorated for Amtrak opening ceremonies on May 1. The black engine has blue arrow with red tail, white nose stripes and lettering. Photographed by Paul Rayton August 5 at Lewiston, Pa., running westbound on the DUQUESNE. On that occasion the engine ran from Harrisburg to Pittsburg only, pulling a three-car consist.

RAIL TRAVEL



Vol. 1 No. 18
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newsletter

"I doubt very seriously
if this train has a future..."

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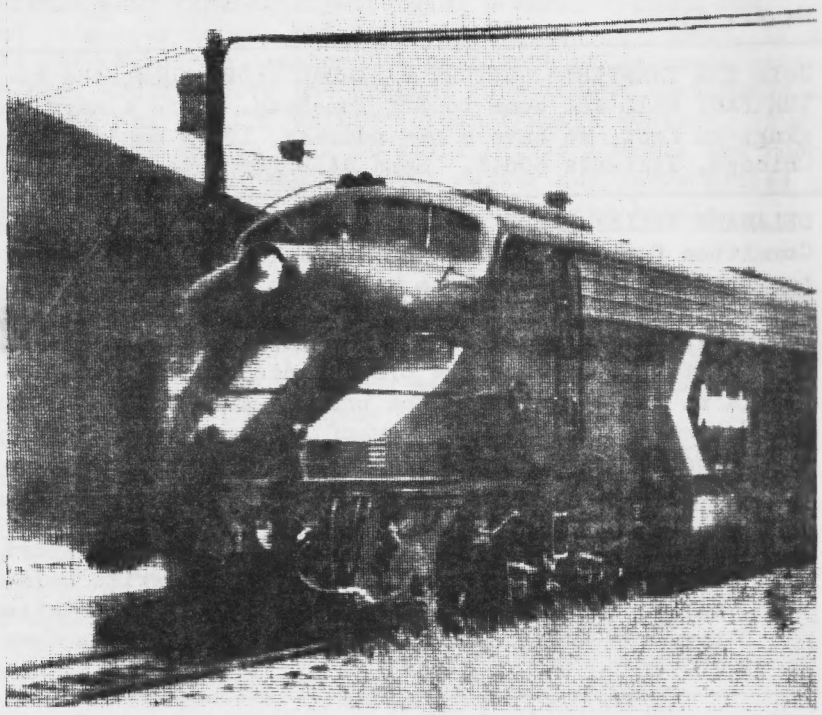

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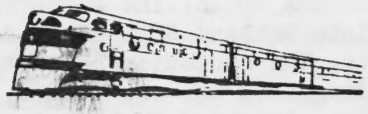

Vol. 1 No. 18
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"I doubt very seriously if this train has a future..."

ON THE COVER: The TurboTrain on its nationwide tour pulls into Oakland Aug. 25 at 8:15pm as crowds of onlookers move in. The quotation below the photo is from SP President B.F. Biaggini, who was aboard. For complete quotation and story, see elsewhere in this issue. Photo by Message Media.

LETTERS

Regarding your question of "What's happening?" (RTN, Aug. 2), perhaps I can clear things up.

TH&B 371/376 are presently operating with one CP RDC-4 & one CP RDC-2. When Empire Service was pushed back 40 mins due to bad PC track, 371's scheduled Buffalo departure time was not changed. PC 71 arrives at 4:40pm and TH&B 371 is due out at 4:30. However, 371 has been held for 71 ever since May 1, usually leaving at 4:45 & reaching Toronto on time.

The only timetables in which this run is fully listed are CP Rail's and that of the TH&B. When I've called PC on occasion inquiring about this train, I am told it was taken off April 30! So much for PC's computerized info setup.

It's usually a well patronized run, but does at times leave here with 4 passengers. TH&B crews handle it (with a PC conductor along for the ride) to Hamilton where CP people take over. Cab rides are usually very easily obtained, once you go thru customs. The fare is $5.40.

I hope this has cleared up your confusion and perhaps brought this train to the attention of many who were not aware of its existence.

Dale Madison

Kenmore, New York

The BROADWAY LIMITED/SPIRIT OF ST. LOUIS are very poor timekeepers. Very often they are ½-hour or more late in either direction. Aug. 8 I rode #49 from N.Y. to Pittsburgh. it was 13 cars from N.Y. to Harrisburg & two GG-1's. The twin-unit diner was on; excellent service, but a standardized menu. At Harrisburg the SPIRIT was waiting; at best its consist was the minimum permitted by Secretary Volpe. ...we were on time into Pittsburgh. Arriving, we found that both the eastbound limiteds were an hour late...

Aug. 14 I was at Harrisburg at 10:00am...I casually walked up to the platforms until I saw two trains of standard cars ...Since they were possibly mail trains, I ran, and to my surprise they were passenger trains. The SPIRIT was 4 hours late!...Apparently Amtrak will have problems with PC on its long-haul runs.

Henry Posner

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania

Rail Travel Newsletter, Vol 1, No 18, August 16, 1971. Published twice monthly, on the 1st & 3rd Mondays, by Message Media, Box 9007, Berkeley CA 94709. $4/year, 25¢/copy. Editor: James Russell. Artist: Michael Cohen.

TURBOTRAIN ON TOUR OF COUNTRY

The famed TurboTrain, which for 2 years has run on Penn Central between Boston & N.Y., began a 12,000-mile tour of 32 states Aug. 11. Start of the tour had been delayed by the rail strikes. Leaving Providence, R.I., it will return Sept. 9 after circling the nation as a durability test and to get the public's reactions, altho in few places could the public actually ride it. The tour is sponsored by the DOT, United Aircraft (builders of the 3-car train), & Amtrak.

First widely-disseminated news of the tour was that on Aug.15 the train struck and killed a boy near Palm Beach, Fla., who was jumping off a trestle into a lake.

Going thru the South, it reached Los Angeles Aug.23, ran in revenue service round trip to San Diego the next day, then left Aug.25 to run up SP's Coast Route to Oakland for a 1-day layover. The cover photo shows the Turbo as it arrived at Oakland 15 mins late, delayed by a slow freight. SP officials rode it from San Jose to Oakland.

Considering that there was virtually no advance publicity in California, large crowds turned out to view it. At several points along the SP route, the main concern of SP police seemed to be to keep people away from the train. At Salinas and San Jose police warned the public to stay 40 feet away because of dangerous heat put out by the turbine engines. The Turbo's superintendent of maintenance was reported incredulous at this misinformation.

At Salinas (pop. 58,000) over 700 turned out and swarmed about the train, despite police warnings. At San Jose a crowd of 500 were fenced off well back from the train during its brief stop. At Oakland, strangely, no such precautions were taken, and the small crowd (there was minimal advance publicity there) could move in and touch the train during its 10-min stop. The CASCADE was right behind it--on time, for once--so the Turbo moved quickly away, but was on display at the depot from 5 to 8pm Aug.26, where a steady stream of visitors could walk thru it (but not enter the domes). Visitor reaction was generally very favorable.

After-the-fact media coverage was good, both TV and newspaper. One of the main points reported was SP President Benjamin Biaggini's remarks aboard the train. According to the S. F. Chronicle he said "It's a very nice piece of equipment. It's clean, comfortable and speedy. But we had much more attractive trains 20 years ago--and we lost passenger service when we provided superior service.

"I doubt very seriously if this train has a future--except in the dense population corridors of the East."

Concerning Amtrak, Biaggini remarked: "I think Amtrak will

preside over the passenger business as it sort of gracefully goes out of business." The Oakland Tribune also quoted Biaggini as saying "It would be pretty silly to put a lot of (these) trains in service if nobody would ride them."

Amtrak Vice President of Operations Harold Wanaselja disagreed, according to the Chronicle. He said "We feel there is a definite need for short-haul, high-speed rail service in the nation's population corridors--including the West--and of 'cruise' or 'long-haul for pleasure' trains."

Our own informal observations locally indicated a great deal of interest and enthusiasm--some people were learning for the first time the location of the train station--which was not completely manifest because of scant publicity about the tour.

Aug.27 the Turbo moved on north from Oakland, and would run in revenue service between Portland & Seattle, then head east toward Chicago and return to the East Coast.

REVIVAL OF SAN JOAQUIN VALLEY SERVICE?

A bill that would return trains to California's San Joaquin Valley--cut off May 1 by the demise of the SAN FRANCISCO CHIEF and the SAN JOAQUIN DAYLIGHT--was introduced in Congress late in July by California's two Senators, Cranston and Tunney. It cannot be acted upon before Congress returns from vacation after Labor Day. The bill requires Amtrak to provide service between San Francisco and Barstow, or Sacramento and Barstow.

A FRIDAY-THE-THIRTEENTH DERAILMENT

One of the two GM&O trains Amtrak runs between Chicago and St. Louis derailed southbound just out of Pontiac, Ill., Aug. 13, after a collision with a gravel truck. About 14 persons were hurt, and one of them apparently died of a heart attack. The 2-engine train had 6 cars and a baggage car. All cars left the track but did not overturn.

PENN CENTRAL'S FEDERAL MAY RETURN

Amtrak is considering reinstating the Boston-Washington FEDERAL, the overnight train that was discontinued May 1, using better equipment. If so, the train will appear in the next Amtrak schedule, due out in late October. There is now no overnight train on the route.

ENLARGED TURBOTRAIN SERVICE PLANNED

Amtrak hopes to begin two daily N.Y.-Boston Turbo roundtrips in the near future. The Turbo now touring the country will replace the other Turbo now in service, and the latter will go into the shops. Later, both trains will run the regular route. Two coaches will be added to each train, to increase seating capacity from 144 to about 250 each trip.

SANTA FE DOMES GO TO PRIVATE COMPANY

When Auto-Train Corp. begins its auto-carrying passenger train runs between Washington D.C. and Disney World in Florida this Fall, it will have ten bi-level dome passenger cars just purchased from Santa Fe to use. The concern plans to charge $200 per auto for the trip. When Auto-Train's stock went on the market this Summer, it sold completely in one day.

GOVERNMENT CUTS FUNDS FOR RAIL DEVELOPMENT

In the $8.1 billion appropriations bill for the Department of Transportation for 1972, the only major agency to be cut was the Federal Railroad Administration, while air and highway agencies got more money than requested. The FRA gets $43.2 million, $23 million less than 1971. However, in the total DOT budget, $10 million will go for grade crossing demonstration projects, $71.3 million for mass transportation. $25 million of the FRA's budget is for high speed ground transportation projects.

MASSACHUSETTS TO IMPROVE CORRIDOR SERVICE

The State of Massachusetts and the Bay Transit Authority plan to buy PC's 38-mile main line between Boston and Rhode Island in order to upgrade passenger service between Boston and Providence. The old Boston & Providence line will be upgraded, with Federal and local funds, to permit runs like that of the Metroliner.

AMTRAK MAKES SCHEDULE CHANGE IN VIRGINIA

Effective Aug. 29, Amtrak/C&O Nos. 1/2 will have a flag stop at Charlottesville, Va., Union (Southern) Station, for the convenience of passengers interchanged between SR and C&O. C&O 1/2 and 41/42 will continue to use Main St. (C&O) Station as regular station stop for switching. A tight connection now almost impossible by taxi will be made: from SR 6 to C&O 1, making possible travel from Atlanta and Charlotte to Cincinnati and Chicago.

Train service between Washington D.C. and Parkersburg, West Virginia is expected to be restored after Labor Day.

MISHAP ON TURBOTRAIN TOUR IN VIRGINIA

The Turbo set fire to the platform roof of the Broad Street Station in Richmond while idling on its visit Aug. 12. Public could ride free Richmond-Petersburg-Raleigh. Train was full, with huge crowds at all stations. Free airline-style lunches were given out. The train hit 90mph just south of Norlina, NC. SCL put all its freights in the hole for the Turbo.

Mixed Train of Thoughts

AMTRAK car purchases so far total about 800, mostly from UP, PC, SCL, some from N&W, C&O/B&O. N&W (WABASH) carpeted domes to go onto Newport News-Chicago run about Sept. 1... MAJOR scheduling changes on Boston-Washington corridor will occur in October. Clocker service (regular train plus Metroliner) out of Washington all day on the hour. More thru trains thru N.Y.... RAILFAN saves the day for Petersburg, VA, Amtrak office: it had no new schedules yet on July 30, till a fan donated 20, acc'd to Steve Farrar in HIGHBALL (monthly newsletter, $3/yr. from NRHS, 1012 Stilwell Rd., Richmond VA 23226)... Steve points out that thru ticketing available Toronto-Chicago, but you must ride a school bus between Windsor & the Detroit Grand Trunk station, then take taxi 2 miles to Amtrak station... DIXIE LIMITED steam excursion runs Sept. 11 & 12. Info from NRHS, Box 8583, Richmond, VA 23226... THE UNNAMED Seattle-San Diego thru train we call the CASCADE (others' names: AMLINER, THRULINER) is in the nasty habit of running an hour or so late. Item: both CASCADES running hour late Aug. 22, so 42 transfers to SUPER CHIEF at L.A. missed it (Amtrak put short-trippers on buses, gave overnight hotel room to those going further.) Item: Same day, northbd. at Oakland, a certain SP VIP got his private car affixed an hour late. Item: Aug.10, train 70 mins late southbd. at Oakland. Item: Aug.23 southbd. at L.A., COAST DAYLIGHT also missed SUPER CHIEF connection. C'mon, SP, you can do better than that. Amtrak doesn't need all those hotel bills... TORRENTIAL rains in Southwest washed out track, caused re-routing of SUNSET over Arizona freight tracks, left train 8 hrs late into L.A. Aug.22... THE CLOCKS at Oakland SP depot that perpetually read 12:00 (is it high noon--or midnight?) will be fixed when parts on order arrive for master clock. Will the trains run on time then?... FIRST completely refurbished Amtrak cars will be on the tracks this Fall, says Amtrak in new publicity blurb... AMTRAK has begun reassignment of equipment, with deadheading of some SP Budd-built coffee shop-lounge cars (Pride of Texas cars off SUNSET) for service elsewhere. Look for more shuffling of cars as Amtrak completes equipment purchases before year end. You the reader can help us keep track by reporting train consists with dates seen, etc.... SILVER STAR still has round end observation in middle of train (see Paul Rayton, p.7). Paul says SCL indeed does make their own sandwiches, wrapping them while leaving N.Y. Also, BROADWAY LTD. got linen back in its twin-unit diner (but no flowers), and 2/4 seating changed to 4/4 arrangement. SCL CHAMPION using some FLORIDA SPECIAL lounges, but with b&w TV instead of color. Amtrak removed carpets from SCL lounges, hopefully with intent to replace them...

KEEPING TRACK

...with Paul Rayton

(A regular RTN feature. Each issue presents another review-critique of a selected pre-Amtrak train.)

SILVER STAR

Date: Spring, 1970

Were the days of 1970 truly the darkest days for rail passengers since the inception of the passenger train? It would seem necessary to answer in the affirmative, for there were only two major railroads that made any real, wholehearted effort to provide above-average service (plus PC's BROADWAY LIMITED, which was an exception). The Seaboard Coast Line RR was one of those two--the other being ATSF. The SCL operated generally-fine service which was marred by occasionally tardy arrivals.

In general, their performance could be characterized as being, well...they provided service which was "tops" at first glance, but they didn't really follow through. A parable can dramatize what I mean: imagine, if you will, a young child about to be taken to his elderly aunt's house. He doesn't want to go, but nonetheless recognizes his responsibility to do this as a social necessity, so he dresses up nicely and tries to be pleasant for the duration--even tho always a little fidgety, for he is anxious to leave and get back to the neighborhood baseball game. SCL was something like the young child: they provided generally superior service that was flawed by omissions of detail.

Many mitigating factors enter into the picture of SCL passenger service. For one thing, SCL inherited probably the heaviest-traveled corridor in the country, at least in terms of so-called long haul travel, in the New York-to-Florida routes. Although heavily seasonal, the traffic in vacation months was the mainstay of the entire (passenger) system.

Another factor is that SCL did inherit a lot of passenger runs when the 1967 merger between Seaboard Air Line RR and the Atlantic Coast Line RR was effected. In order to bring the costs of their passenger trains down, and yet still preserve a modicum of service to passengers, the newly-formed SCL "consolidated" trains so that some trains left from New York with an equipment "sequence" that would boggle the imagination.

The trains were run with an attempt at "class," as much class as could economically be provided. The SILVER STAR was at the middle point in the cosmogeny of SCL trains. It was one of the three year-round "prime" trains serving Florida from New York, but it was neither as fast nor as classy as its companions, the SILVER METEOR and the CHAMPION. But it offered a lot more than the other end of the SCL spectrum, a train like the PALMLAND which, though named, was virtually an overnight local (a "milk run") between New York and Columbia, S.C. Yet even the PALMLAND, now in its dog days, still carried a sleeper and a cafe-lounge. The comparison with some other overnight runs will speak for itself.

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CAPTAIN AMTRACK

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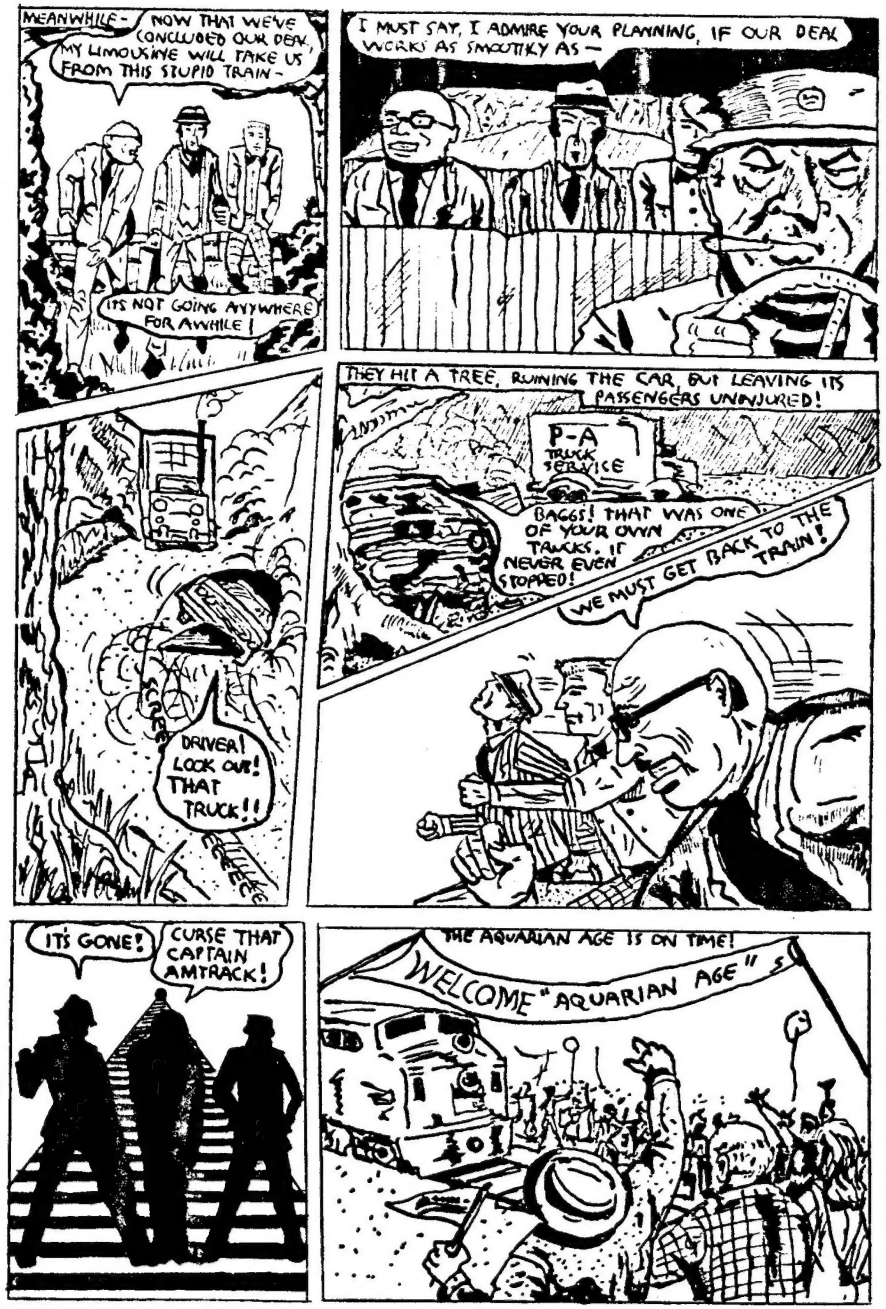

(Continued from page 7)

deck. Add a coach destined for Miami at Washington D.C., and add a sleeper destined for Miami in Richmond, Va. Then you have a train that requires car switchings at no less than four stops en route. The prospect of trying to sleep at 4:00am in Jacksonville on a train that is in the process of being assembled makes me--well, makes me glad I never rode this particular train on an overnight ride to Sarasota.

My observations have been that these SCL trains could often run late. I'm not surprised, considering the yard work involved (which actually is inexcusable, but did you ever see a railroad worker hustle? Seldom in 1970 did you).

The odd car arrangement even showed up in the lounge. Would you believe a genuine round-end lounge car--in the middle of a train? I expressed surprise over this situation to a Trainman one dey. "Oh, it's only like this as far as Jacksonville, then it's the end car like it should be." Great! An observation for the last 400 miles, easily 100 of which would pass under darkness.

While I couldn't buy this "musical cars" business, the balance of the train showed intentions of an impressive operation. For one thing, by early 1970, economy moves on the Penn Central had eliminated all (save one) dining cars on runs between New York and Washington. You could eat, but in the overpriced and under-qualitied "snack bar coach," or a Parlor Car "meal" which was a glorified TV dinner.

All was not lost, though! Travelers who had the time and energy to make the necessary exhaustive search of timetables discovered that the major SCL trains carried their dining cars from Florida right into New York. Of course, how many people could muster the devotion to bother with that, I ask you? The average traveler would never do that, and, not knowing about SCL, see the diner-less situation as just another reason for not taking the train next time.

Of course, nothing was easy anymore. The person wishing to use space in the SCL section of the train (PC coaches going only as far as Washington usually were the forward half of the consist) had to do some fast thinking and slippery talking. All SCL coach seats were reserved and assigned in advance. Persons with just regular tickets were supposed to sit in those broken-down PC coaches up front. After a couple of faux pas I learned a "system" for passing through and from then on enjoyed excellent breakfasts even though just riding to Philadelphia.

What a super feeling I recall, riding in the diner of the SILVER STAR on spring days. From Penn Station, while passing through the dark tunnels under the Hudson River, I would make my way into the dining car and get seated at a table. Suddenly, whooooooosh! and you were out in the bright, clear sunshine of the "Jersey Meadows." Sun would positively beam in the windows. The sky never looked bluer, the appetite never better. Hooray for SCL and their dining cars!

The tables in the car were all decked out with immaculate white linen tablecloths and napkins. A big SCL logo was sewn into both articles. The napkin even had a date sewn in--1970. Someone out there obviously really hoped to see the service continue for some time to come. How else can you explain making that expense even for the napkins?

The pleasures derived from eating in dining cars are myriad, and also, I think, somewhat like "Cracker Jacks"--the more you eat there, the more you want to. It is one of the ultimate, unmitigated and unparalleled luxuries of human existence. I would rather eat in a dining car (real, that is) enroute from New York to Philadelphia than even eat at home. It might cost a little more than home cookin', but home cookin' I can get on other days, and besides at home (or even in the Waldorf Astoria, for that matter) there isn't changing scenery out the window. Nor can I accept the reasoning that only a "railfan" enjoys this type of service. There is absolutely nothing intrinsically wrong with dining cars, and they offer several advantages, even for short distance travelers. There would seem to be no reason that, given proper merchandising and staffing, the dining cars between New York and Washington couldn't be operated with capacity crowds and happy patrons--including even the jaundiced New York crowd who are never pleased by anything.

Breakfast prices were actually very reasonable. My particular favorite was "Breakfast #3," which for $1.65 offered fruit, juice or cereal; then a main course of French Toast with syrup or honey, and beverage. There was orange marmalade too. You could tell this was a Southern train just from the menu: grits would be served on request. There was a children's breakfast for 95¢, and a couple of adult economy breakfasts, the "Vacationeer" for $1.35, or the "Early Bird" for $1.10. True to form, though, you would get more for your money if you ordered the full course meal.

The French Toast came (3 slices) lightly sprinkled with powdered sugar, and thick sliced. Railroads are one of the few institutions left in the world that serve French Toast properly thick. I found the French Toast acceptable. It wasn't outstanding, but was nevertheless properly prepared and a delight to eat. The waiter was cooperative with my wishes to have both marmalade and syrup with my Toast.

For a company that seemed to try so hard with its passenger services, there were still a couple of non-sequiturs: why didn't SCL use carpets in their dining cars? They are important for noise control as well as for their significant contribution to general decor. And I would have expected better than plastic flowers in the window, too. The sun streaming in those windows onto those "flowers" and barren linoleum flooring was distressing to me. That carpet is necessary!

Service was perfunctory on my first trip (almost turned me off to SCL) and adequate on other trips. They never killed you with kindness, if you know what I mean. They didn't go out of their way to insult you, but they certainly didn't go out of their way to help you, either. On that first trip, the crew members were so engrossed in socializing and reading a letter of commendation sent to one of them (!) that my waving hands fanned air for seeming hours before I finally caught my waiter's attention and got my tea. Besides his inattentiveness, his bearing was brusque.

I don't want to derogate the overall operation, though. I am sure that it was just early in the morning, or a bad day. On the majority of my experiences on the SILVER STAR I found the crew to be civil and competent--though still never really "eager."

When we rode the SILVER STAR further than Philadelphia, we were in North Carolina before we were ready for dinner. We had spent the afternoon socializing in the round-end lounge in the middle of the train talking with passengers and the "Passenger Service Agent" (a position unique to SCL) who rode aboard and whose job, in his words, was to "socialize with the passengers." The car was well worn and rather ancient. It must have seen much use since it was built, and the millions of miles were evident in the worn upholstery. The lounge area was also furnished with a writing desk replete with a good supply of "SCL" letter stationery and a stack of handy "pocket

timetables" for the SILVER STAR.

Dinner was served from a most distinctive, varied, and interesting menu. Imprinted with the name of the train (not just "SCL"), the menu offered intriguing possibilities such as Beef Consomme, Creole or Oyster Cocktail for appetizers. The dinner entrees were fairly straightforward dishes, but enough choices were offered to satisfy most any taste. These included Charcoal Broiled Sirloin Steak ($5.65 complete); Roast Leg of Spring Lamb, mint jelly ($3.65); and Chopped Sirloin Steak, fried onions for $3.30.

There were many unique touches worth noting in the preparation and serving of the specialities. For example, also listed was Fried Select Oysters, tartar sauce, with "hush puppies," ($3.60). Or, there was Sliced Turkey, served with cheese sauce, accompanied by grilled tomatoes, en cassolette ($3.50). Several vegetables were available, including hot carrots in cream, stewed tomatoes, and lyonnaise potatoes.

For my dinner, I ordered the Charcoal Broiled Sirloin Steak, which came slightly rarer than requested, and a little tough. The tomatoes were stewed with precision but not really spiced enough for me. My wife had one of the "specials," Broiled Club Steak,

served as a complete dinner (no dessert) for $3.95. This was prepared just right and had a pleasing natural juice gravy. In fact, it was better than my sirloin! Her mixed green salad was chilled and as crisp as can be expected for this type of salad. It was garnished with SCL's own "private stock" brand of French dressing. They were not very generous with the dressing, I thought, but it blended well with the salad.

Breads, pineapple muffins, and rolls were all available, and many desserts, including, of all things, Baked Florida Grapefruit. I chickened out from that, and had the Rice and Raisin Pudding, which was tolerable. The apple pie was delicious and not too crusty. The usual beverages were provided.

One bone I have to pick with the dining car department was the wine selection. The only wine carried was Nectarose Vin Rosé d'Anjou, $2.00 for a half-bottle. First of all, why only that one wine? It wouldn't cost any more to carry, say, five bottles of red and five bottles of white wine, than it costs now carrying ten bottles of rosé wine. Most serious wine lovers prefer either the red or the white wine to the bland, ambiguous rosés. Furthermore, even if they do drink rosés, the rosé d'Anjou is often too sweet for drinking with food. Fortunately such was not our problem, but it could be a consideration important when trying to sell new customers on all the advantages of taking the train on their next trip.

All in all, the SILVER STAR offered a fine selection of dishes, to fit both a variety of tastes and a variety of pocketbooks. A flexible system like this with both à la carte and full dinner service offers an excellent way to please most travelers along a route.

The crew for our dinner was friendly and efficient. I enjoyed the dinner quite a bit, and was happy to see that a lot of other people were similarly inclined.

For other drinks, the bar provided a cocktail list, with beer at 50¢ and most drinks (even B&B) standardized at $1.10. Cigarettes were sold for a mere 40¢, undoubtedly the cheapest pack of cigarettes on the rails.

No one will ever know for sure, but pundits bandy around facts about how SCL actually made money in their passenger operations. If they did, I would not be surprised, for they alone showed signs of intelligent, sensitive management and thoughtful use of the employees who were on board. For instance, after the dining car closed, a big urn of coffee was taken into the tavern-lounge car where, for 15¢ a cup, passengers could get fresh, hot coffee until midnight (and in the early morning). Most anywhere else the sordid picture is all too familiar to experienced train riders: when the dining car is closed, man, that is IT. NOTHING. (Unless there is a long station stop and a coin machine.) Also available in the lounge were sandwiches, priced within reason. In fact, it is interesting to note that the sandwiches bore the SCL logo, proudly displayed right on the wrapper. They must make decent sandwiches, I deduced without eating one, if they dare put their name right out front like that.

Another incident that similarly typified the aggressive merchandising needed. Later in the evening, when the dining car was finished serving dinner, one man was sent through the coach section of the train with a basket of soft drinks and sandwiches, for on-the-spot sales. And it was quite a hit, for obvious reasons. How many kids can resist when the "Good Humor" truck comes around the neighborhood? You can imagine the pressures exerted on the hapless parents for a "snack" just before bed. It was a fine idea, beneficial to both company and passenger.

They even capitalized on their special blend French dressing, like we'd had at dinner. Little printed announcements advised us that we could take home a pint bottle of it for $1.00. It was really extraordinarily good, one of the best French dressings I have ever encountered. I bought several.

To sum everything up, I would like to conjure up another simile for the SILVER STAR. It had all the makings of a truly top-notch train. But, like a symphony orchestra playing Beethoven's Fifth, if the members of the orchestra are not all exactly in tune, the result is a sour sound. The SILVER STAR had most of the instruments, but it really needed a couple more musicians and a good Conductor (no pun intended) to derive the optimum performance.

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QUOTES OF THE WEEK ***

"...they have plain old-fashioned steam engine railroad trains--what my old friend Tom Wicker would call the real thing--with big red wheels and red cow catchers, and engines that pant and snort in the station and run with a red glow through the night, and dining cars where the cook comes back and negotiates your dinner, and compartments with fans and lace antimacassars on the seats, and long lonely whistles that trouble you in your sleep."

--James Reston, N.Y. Times, from Red China

"People are still interested in passenger trains... Just give us back the steam whistle--that will bring glamor back to the countryside, and the passengers."

--SP Conductor E. E. Thoms, riding the Turbo Train, quoted in S.F. Chronicle, Aug. 26

"Between the vigorous efforts of the trucking and construction interests for bigger, better and more numerous highways and the lethargy of the public, rail transportation has sunk to lower and lower levels. Now, the new Federal system, Amtrak, using Federal funds, seems designed to lay railroad passenger service quietly to rest."

--Lettie Gay Carson, N.Y. Times, Aug. 14

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EDITORIAL

Rail Travel Newsletter wholeheartedly agrees with the National Association of Railroad Passengers in their contention that Amtrak will get nowhere toward its goal of "making the trains worth traveling again" until it becomes the official employer of those who are operating the passenger trains. Instead of contracting with individual railroads to run trains, Amtrak should build its own organization and let train personnel be directly responsible to it.

We have observed far too many examples of railroads just doing business as usual, of dragging their feet, of passive resistance to improvements, of merely awaiting the day when the passenger train will fade away into oblivion.

Even if these things were not so, it would be necessary for a single organization to be totally responsible for passenger operations, given the sort of system Amtrak is supposed to run, if only to assure that the system is run on an efficient basis. The many diverse railroads now operating the trains are too much to oversee when Amtrak has no direct control of what goes on in every nook and cranny of the system.

The individual roads control the nooks and crannies, and they aren't interested in operating passenger trains.

COMMUTING AND RAPID TRANSIT

Fate of PC Upper Harlem Division Pending

The Harlem Valley Transportation Association is desperately trying to save the PC line that connects rural Harlem Valley with New York City. The ICC has refused to rule on the case of abandonment of the line, and it goes to Federal court in early September. Lettie Gay Carson is VP of the Association, and if her persuasive article in the N.Y. Times (Aug.14) doesn't help, what will? Argues Lettie: abandoning passenger service will mean freight will go too, with higher prices all around because of more costly trucking; and auto commuting problems are all too well known. It makes for a bad scene.

NARP Supports Legislation to Simplify Equipment Replacement

Cities with financially-troubled transit systems could find it easier to get Federal help for new equipment, if a bill introduced by Senator Gordon Allott of Colorado passes. The bill would remove the present requirement that funds can only be disbursed for unified urban transit systems. It would permit exceptions to this so small cities (Denver and Pueblo, Colo., for example) can get help easier and large cities can replace wornout buses or rail cars with less hassle.

Secret Highway Lobby to be Exposed in California

When Proposition 18, the well-known ballot measure last November that would have permitted some state highway funds to be used for rapid transit, was defeated largely because of a massive, secret campaign waged by oil companies and other members of the highway lobby, Sec'y of State Edmund G. Brown Jr. tried to expose the anonymous contributors of $95 thousand, as he could under the state election code. However, a court battle ensued to determine if that part of the election code was constitutional. The state supreme court upheld the law in a ruling Aug.19, and now Brown is free to resume prosecution of Standard Oil, Mobil and Gulf Oil Companies, and several smaller defendants. Brown has vowed to "expose to public view the previously secret operation of California's infamous highway lobby."

Subway Tunnel Work Angers Park Users

New York City's Metropolitan Transportation Authority this month began excavation thru Central Park for a new subway tunnel connecting Manhattan and Queens. But when the work went through a children's playground, users became infuriated and attempted to physically halt the project and refill the excavation. MTA officials met with protesters to explain that the disrupted area would be replaced as well as possible.

Express Ads

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WANTED: Railroad dining car silverware, china, glassware, serving pieces, trays, etc. Buy only, no trades. No menus. S. Schiechl, 25 Cervantes Blvd, San Francisco, CA 94123.

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DELAWARE VALLEY READERS: The new Delaware Valley Citizens Committee for Better Transportation is working "for better transportation--rail as well as highway--between Philadelphia and the suburbs and seashore; for a more balanced, more diversified, more imaginative transportation system to replace the present disproportionate emphasis on the highway and the private automobile." First project was an on-train survey of opinions from passengers on the Pennsylvania-Reading Seashore Lines train to Ocean City, Wildwood, and Cape May. Results of the survey will be published in a report to the New Jersey Department of Transportation. For a complimentary copy of the report plus other information about the new group, write Delaware Valley Citizens Committee for Better Transportation, c/o Harry Hyde Jr. (Dept. RTN), P.O. Box 429, Bryn Mawr, PA 19010.

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